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*Assessing the Impact of Cross-Cultural Communication Competence on Expatriate Business Operations in Multinational Corporations of a Sub-Saharan African Context*

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**Abstract**

This study investigated the impact of cross-cultural communication competence on expatriates' work outcomes in emerging economies. Using a convergent parallel design methodology of data collection comprising an in-depth face-to-face interview with 21 expatriate executives, and a quantitative survey of 204 expatriates in various subsidiaries in Ghana, a structural equation modelling (SEM) and a content analysis were the basis of data analysis. Findings showed that host country culture is positively related to cross-cultural communication competence. Additionally, expatriates' cross-cultural communication competence is influenced by multicultural team effectiveness and their interpersonal skills. The work recommends training of expatriates in cross-cultural communication for subsidiary assignments.

**Key words:** Cross-cultural Communication Competence; Expatriates; Host country culture; Multicultural team effectiveness; interpersonal skills; Ghana.

## **Introduction**

The increasing internationalization of business calls for the need to manage multinational operations as well as expatriate staff and their work outcomes in an efficient way. This demand has increased the focus on the critical role of cross-cultural communication competence in managing diverse work group and multicultural team development (Bell and Fernandez-Riol, 2017; Matveev and Nelson, 2004). In fact, successful cross-cultural interaction between multinational staff has now been accepted as the most critical management issue in international business both at the individual and group levels of analysis (Barner-Rasmussen, Ehrnrooth, Koveshnikov and Makela, 2014; Felin, Foss, Heimeriks and Madsen, 2012), as it can impact positively on expatriates' work outcomes in multinational corporations (MNCs).

Cross-cultural communication is the interaction or communication between culturally diverse people who have different value orientations and different communication codes within a community of work and socialization (Abugre, 2016; Moran, Harris and Moran, 2011). From this definition, cross-cultural communication can therefore be an emotional process that involves a considerable amount of uncertainty and a potential for misunderstanding between multicultural team members (Ozcelik and Paprika, 2010). As a result, competence in cross-cultural communication is the ability to manage cross-cultural uncertainties with cultural empathy and high interpersonal skills (Matveev and Nelson, 2004). It is defined as the knowledge, motivation, and skills to communicate effectively with members of a host culture (Spitzberg and Changnon, 2009). Cross-cultural communication competence enables expatriate managers and local employees from different cultures to co-exist and to coordinate their work activities in a concerted effort towards the achievement of corporate goals (Abugre, 2016; Nakayama and Halualani, 2010). Consequently, research suggests that effective interpersonal communication is critical for expatriate adjustment (Froese, Peltokorpi, and Ko, 2012), knowledge flows in multinational corporations (Tippman, Scott and Mangematin,

2012), global leadership success (Bird and Mendenhall, 2016) MNCs' performance (Kuznetsov and Kuznetsova, 2014; Liu, Adair and Bello, 2015), among the many expatriates' work outcomes. Despite its importance, empirical studies of the impact of cross-cultural communication on expatriates work outcomes with other critical perspectives are now beginning to be exploited and therefore this grey area is bursting with prospects yet to be realized especially in emerging economies. Accordingly, Tung (2008) proposes that there is the need to balance cross-national and cross-cultural investigations in order to truly understand the globalization of the cultural phenomena. The necessity of knowledge extension in unexploited regions have thus called for more postcolonial investigation in international business particularly in emerging economies (Joy and Poonamallee, 2013) like those of sub-Saharan Africa (Jackson, 2004).

Consequently, the purpose of this study is to investigate the significant contributions of cross-cultural communication on expatriates work outcomes. In sum, the contribution of this work is threefold: first in terms of theory, our significant contribution is to investigate the impact of cross-cultural communication on expatriate work outcomes for the creation and extension of knowledge in cross-cultural communication in international business. The choice of emerging economies as the location of the investigation is extremely relevant for contemporary theoretical context for management research that is making waves into the emerging economies, and extends the cross-cultural lens beyond the dominant and over-saturated West/East epistemology.

Second, MNCs have often been described as multilingual organizations (Luo and Shenkar, 2006). This presupposes the importance of expatriates' interpersonal skills, their training in host country culture, and multicultural team effectiveness as critical factors of expatriates' competence in cross-cultural communication that can facilitate their adaptation and adjustment in diverse and distant subsidiary locations (Abugre, 2016). This work thus contributes to the

International Business (IB) field by testing these variables to determine whether they can serve as foundations or antecedents of expatriate cross-cultural communication competence. This contribution is also in direct response to Luring and Klitmøller (2015)'s request that research on the impact of communication and language differences on intra- and inter-unit communication is still underdeveloped and needs further clarification. Thus, a significant problem in technical communication for international management is urging expatriates to understand that the communication they send out is accurate, valid, and useful for multinational corporate operations.

Third, this work makes a methodological contribution to pragmatism – mixed methods research comprising both quantitative and qualitative approaches to research also called the “third methodological movement” which has generated a tremendous interest for the past 20 years (Creswell and Plano- Clark, 2011), and which calls have been made to embrace it as a robust investigation method (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003; Creswell, 2005). Despite this advocacy, there are relatively few published studies in cross-cultural management with mixed methods. The contribution of this work is thus enormous in the IB literature. Therefore, we hope that our contribution furthers the cause of intercultural and cross-cultural communication and increases the sensitivity in cultural pluralism and management in IB research.

## **Theoretical Background**

### ***Cross-cultural Communication as a conduit of expatriates' internalized cultural values and epistemology***

The subject of cross-cultural communication is beginning to receive academic attention due to changes in the global workforce, as large percentages of most nations' workforce come from a variety of cultural backgrounds (Okoro and Washington, 2012; MacKenzie and Forde, 2009). As a result of the differences in cultures, multicultural team members working together in MNCs vary in their communicative behaviors, and this can pose a challenge to effectively

understand each other. Thus, prescriptions for effective communication in cross-cultural encounters often suggest adapting one's behavior to that of the other culture by learning to understand the value systems and communicative behaviors of the local or indigenous people (Abugre, 2016). The explanation is that communicative behaviors of expatriates during cross-cultural encounters demonstrate the internalized cultural values as well as inconsistency-reduction and inconsistency-support behaviors (Pekerti and Thomas, 2003). This is why communicating parties would normally attribute cultural meanings to their experiences and actions which are shaped by the social and political relationship in which they are embedded (Lauring and Klitmøller, 2015). This means that, people from different cultures speak differently because of the influence of some cultural norms that are embedded in speech acts (Moalla, 2013). The implication is that individuals from different cultures communicate differently not because they have different linguistic codes, but because these linguistic codes are used differently from their respective cultures (Wierzbicka, 1991). Accordingly, Harzing and Feely (2008) argue that failure to communicate effectively leads to uncertainty, anxiety and mistrust, which produces misattribution, conflict and cognitive distortion of expatriates in subsidiary locations. Therefore, Welch and Welch (2008) recognizes that communication competence is a moderating or intervening variable to effective knowledge transfer in MNCs. This discovery is consistent with Barner-Rasmussen and Bjorkman (2005)'s finding that communication and language fluency is a key factor in inter-unit communication intensity of MNCs.

Thus, an important role of expatriates or global managers is to effectively communicate across cultures in order to produce a well-managed team comprising both expatriates and local or indigenous staff. A multicultural team with a shared character that supersedes problems of individual identity that may impede the team to accomplish the corporate goals is the aim of MNCs. Hence, for expatriates, the reconciliation of conflicting values, practices, and systems

between co-workers is a critical challenge, which is often exacerbated when co-workers originate from diverse institutional environments, such as established market economies (Danis, 2003). For this matter, expatriates themselves admit that they do not understand the way people communicate in distant and complex subsidiaries and therefore, they have much to learn from local employees in these areas (Engelhard and Na'gele, 2003). The lack of cross-cultural skills of the majority of expatriates may be viewed as a further barrier to learning at the individual level.

Thus, as more and more Western multinational corporations continue to search for markets in Africa, there is the need to focus on the surge of diversity, and multicultural teamwork. That is expatriates and local staff working harmoniously- in this case, the need for effective cross-cultural communication competency at the subsidiary locations will continue to increase in importance. This is why critical IB scholars have lately called for more attention to the negotiations and conflicts among multicultural teams and groups and their often divergent motives and interests in MNCs (Blazejewski, 2009).

### **Conceptualization of Study Variables**

Multinational corporations (MNCs) are highly dependent on effective communication to control and coordinate their distributed operations. This is often carried out by the workforce consisting of both local staff from the location and expatriates from headquarters or other third country nationals. Hence, there are many potential consequences of the work of expatriates in subsidiary locations, as the predictive influence of cultural values in communication has great impact on expatriate behaviors and their subsidiary work operations (Merkin, Taras and Steel, 2014). This study focuses on three basic variants of successful business operations or outcomes: training in host country culture, multicultural team effectiveness, and interpersonal skills of expatriates. These specific expatriates' work practices can be the critical requirements of managerial insights into effective subsidiary operations because; they demonstrate both

external and internal outcomes of international human resource practices. First, training in host country culture is the acquisition of cross-cultural awareness, sensitivity, and appreciation of the host culture (Chen, 2010) for successful business operation which comprises of the value systems and communicative behaviors of indigenes. Since there is great deal of uncertainty in employees' behaviors in both individualistic and collectivist cultures, there is often considerable potential for conflict that can impede effective business operations in the subsidiary. Cross-cultural competence in interpersonal relationship requires knowledge, motivation, and skills in using verbal and nonverbal codes (Lustig and Koester, 2006), and this calls for expatriates' interpersonal skills acquisition. Second, the dimension of interpersonal skills of expatriates describes the responses, experiences and competencies which can facilitate expatriates' adaptation to local cultures and consequently enhance their cross-cultural communication competence for successful business operations. Expatriates' interpersonal skills are preponderant to their selection criteria for international assignment as they help them to build and value relationship in different cultures (Yamazaki and Kayes, 2004). In fact, interpersonal skills encompass social intelligence that enable expatriates to understand the feelings, thoughts, and behaviors in interpersonal situations and to act appropriately on the basis of understanding (Marlowe, 1986) business operations, which is a product of competence of cross-cultural communication. These skills facilitate their multicultural team effectiveness. Third, the dimension of multinational team effectiveness refers to the critical skills or ability of an expatriate to understand and clearly communicate team goals, roles and norms to other members of a multicultural team particularly local staff (Matveev, Rao and Milter, 2001) for effective business operations or outcomes in the subsidiary. The success of working effectively in a multicultural team is a hallmark of expatriates' achievement in subsidiary or distant location. This success has a direct relation with their communication competence.



## **Literature and Hypotheses**

### ***Training in Host Country Culture and Cross-Cultural Communication Competence***

Most international business writers (Abugre, 2016; Tung, 2008; Black and Mendenhall, 1990) have advocated the importance of training of expatriates in host country culture during assignments. It is particularly critical to examine the cross-cultural differences in communication patterns, as these differences impact cross-cultural communication inversely depending on the backgrounds of expatriates in the local subsidiary (Gudykunst, 2003; Hsu, 2010). Therefore, examining how individuals interpret and handle cross-cultural differences in a host-culture context is very important for corporate success (Berry, 2009; Xu, 2013). Accordingly,

Kupka (2015) affirm that there is a certainty of relationship between intercultural training and the development of intercultural communication competence. Equally, Mansour and Wood (2010) indicate that formalized training programmes, and informal practices such as relating with co-workers, locals, and neighbours are major factors in assisting expatriates' adjustment and their communications in subsidiary location. Kim (2001) recognizes the importance of competence as a requirement in a range of areas including language and host-culture norms, while Holopainen and Björkman (2005) also emphasize the importance of willingness to get involved with host nationals through effective interactions. Besides, the emerging consensus among international business scholars is that intercultural communication involves the cognitive, affective, and behavioral attributes of expatriates (Bennett, 2009). Therefore, training in host country culture will probably increase expatriates' accuracy in interpreting both verbal and nonverbal emotional expressions of local staff, and so broaden their appreciation and empathy for subsidiary environment and consequently enhance their work outcomes. Accordingly, we hypothesize that:

**H1:** *Expatriates' training in host culture is positively related to their cross-cultural communication competence that will eventually enhance their business operations or outcomes in SSA.*

***Multicultural Team Effectiveness and Cross-Cultural Communication Competence***

According to Matveev and Nelson (2004), cross cultural communication competence is very much associated with multicultural team effectiveness. They contend that competence in cross-cultural communication facilitates expatriate managers' understanding of team goals, their roles and norms in multinational subsidiary. Thus, a cohesive multicultural team is capable of advancing knowledge among members if the level of interactions among them is effective.

An effective multicultural team enjoys team empowerment which is contingent on the cultural context that team operates, this facilitates knowledge sharing and team performance (Jiang, Flores, Leelawong and Manz, 2016). Consequently, Kappagomtula (2017) suggests that the compositions of cross- or multicultural team projects should take into consideration the sensitivity of the team members to ensure unified execution of large projects with the help of effective communication or face-to-face interactions between the team members. Because verbal and nonverbal communication patterns vary greatly across cultures, multicultural team members from low-context communication and high-context communication would naturally prefer different communication modes which may be threatening to each other and team harmony (Gudykunst, 2003; Yoo, Matsumoto and LeRoux, 2006). However, competence in cross-cultural communication would enable expatriates from either a low-context or high-context culture appreciate the differences in context related language thereby encouraging and enhancing group harmony and team effectiveness. Accordingly, we hypothesize that:

**H2:** *Multicultural team effectiveness is positively related to expatriates' cross-cultural communication competence that will eventually enhance their business operations or outcome in SSA.*

### ***Interpersonal Skills and Cross-Cultural Communication Competence of Expatriates***

Skills are learned responses which are often resulted from specific training, and which can afford someone the ability to perform a particular task or to achieve a particular goal (Statt, 1999). Thus, an individual expatriate's responses, experiences and competencies which can facilitate his/her adaptation to local cultures and consequently enhance his/her cross-cultural communication competence can be described as interpersonal skill. Studies in international business and culture have demonstrated that cross-cultural skills are important drivers of expatriate success (Black and Mendenhall, 1990; Varma, Pichler, Budhwar and Biswas, 2009), and that cultural norms are significant to managerial interpersonal skills. Interpersonal skills are a key component of what effective managers do (Riggio and Tan, 2013), and they form one of three primary competency dimensions that are integral to managerial task. In fact, interpersonal skills such as coaching and developing others, team building, and the ability to resolve conflicts are among the most relevant skills for managerial work. Thus, expatriates 'interpersonal skills may comprise of specific actions or behaviors, including environmental or cultural factors. These personal skills play a major role in the individual expatriate's commitment and values to learning during international assignment (Kayes, 2002). The interpersonal skills embrace the socio-cultural and relational motivation of the individual to enhance his/her social interactions with his colleagues especially the indigenous staff. Therefore, an interpersonal skill is an appropriate term to classify the variety of factors which describe expatriates' cross-cultural knowledge and understanding of the work of MNCs.

From the foregoing, we suggest that interpersonal skills of expatriates be considered with the dynamic degree of importance by expatriates operating in culturally distant locations. The reason is that expatriates who are equipped with better interpersonal skills can communicate more competently and can work more effectively in a multicultural team (Matveev and Nelson, 2004; Abugre, 2018). Consequently this study hypothesizes that:

*H3: Expatriates' interpersonal skills is positively related to their cross-cultural communication competence that will eventually enhance their business operations or outcomes in SSA.*

### **Contextual Background of Ghana**

Ghana is a sub-Saharan African nation which lies within West Africa. A colony of British rule for a long time, her official language is English which is inherited from the British. However, there are over 100 indigenous languages spoken by the citizens. Socially, Ghana is known for her strong socio-cultural background. With the numerous tribes and several many indigenous languages, Ghanaians place strong values on the authorities of Chiefs as custodians of the various lands and cultures. Ghanaian cultural principles are strongly respected even within corporate organisations with values oriented strongly towards respect for leadership and the elderly (Abugre 2013). Politically, Ghana has been acclaimed the most stable nation in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) and also adjudged global best performer in doing business in West Africa, thereby strengthening the growth in her external investments' inflows. Industrially, Gold dominates the mining sector and Ghana is Africa's second most important producer of gold after South Africa, the third largest producer of manganese and aluminium and an important producer of bauxite and diamonds (Coakley, 1999). In addition, Ghana produces oil in large quantities for export. Having joined the world nations of oil producers in 2007, the country is in partnership with several many multinational companies (MNCs) to explore and extract its new found oil fields. Some the MNCs are; Tullow Oil PLC, Kosmos Energy, Exxon Mobile, Anadarko Energy, Total SA, Chevron Corp, Royal Dutch Shell Group PLC, BP PLC, Cnooc, ONGC's Videsh Ltd, just to mention a few. Thus, in addition to the numerous gold mining companies in the country, there is a proliferation of MNCs operating in various businesses in the country. This makes Ghana a hub of MNCs where several expatriates and

local staff work together as multicultural team, and where expatriates have a lot to learn from cross-cultural management.

### **Methodology and Research Design**

To sufficiently meet the study objectives, this work used a mixed methodology procedure of gathering and analysing both quantitative and qualitative data within a single study (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003; Creswell, 2005). The significance of triangulating both quantitative and qualitative methods in a single research work is to sufficiently capture the trends and details of complex issues emanating from the communicative behaviors of expatriates in subsidiary locations. Accordingly, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches to data gathering complement each other to provide a more rigorous and complete picture of the research problem (Johnson and Turner, 2003). Thus, this study used a convergent parallel design (Creswell and Plano-Clark, 2011) in which both quantitative and qualitative strands of data are gathered and analysed independently, and then both results are synthesised for interpretation. This is because, to understand the world better, we need both numbers and words to appreciate our complex context (Miles, Huberman and Saldana, 2014). Consequently, the survey was administered directly to expatriates through the Human resource managers of the studied MNCs. Initial letter requesting permission to undertake the study was sent (with a sample interview guide and questionnaire attached) to the Ghana Investment Promotion Centre (GIPC) - this is the regulatory body in-charge of all multinational corporations in Ghana. The GIPC then selected 23 MNCs that had a number of active expatriates in operations. A supportive or cover letter from the GIPC was then attached to our initial letter requesting permission to undertake the study to the respective HR managers of the selected MNCs. The letter specifically stated that only expatriates were meant to complete the questionnaires, and also demanded an interview schedule with either the HR manager or the managing director if

they were expatriates. Hence, the target population in this study was all expatriates working in Ghana in the selected (by GIPC) MNC subsidiaries.

Therefore, the questionnaires were given to the HR managers of the various MNC subsidiaries in Ghana, who then distributed the questionnaires to their expatriates to which the researcher was to come back in two months' time for collection of the completed questionnaires. This is one of the most effective way to get the right participants to provide information for any study as all HR managers get involved in the distribution of the survey instruments to their employees supported by the regulator (GIPC). Consequently, some of the expatriates in off-shore operations and the mines demanded a soft copy of the questionnaire and the researcher's email address to which they mailed their completed questionnaires to him directly. Thus, from 250 expected potential expatriates participants, 204 responded (direct collection and through e-mail), which constituted a response rate of 81.6%. Reliability and validity of the survey scales and items were established, using descriptive statistics, discriminant validity test and internal consistency reliability indexes including factor analysis, confirmatory factor analysis, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability and item-total correlation.

## **Quantitative Phase**

### ***Data Collection and Measurement of Scales***

First, the quantitative phase involved a cross-sectional survey design with an adopted instrument for participants to self-complete. The core survey items formed a 7-point Likert type scale. The measures related to cross-cultural communication competence, training in host country culture, multinational team effectiveness, and interpersonal skills. Table 1 presents the survey items that measured each variable, as well as reliability indexes for each subscale. The first part measured 9 items on expatriates' cross-cultural communication competence. The second part measured 12 items on expatriates' interpersonal skill. The items were loosely modelled on those presented by Matveev et al. (2001)'s Cross Cultural Communication

Competence (CCC) questionnaire. (Response format: 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree). The third part measured 9 items on a combination of the importance of training in host country culture and previous knowledge adapted from pre-departure knowledge scale by Black (1990). (Response format: 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree). The fourth part measured 10 items on team effectiveness between expatriates and local staff, these were also adapted and modified from Matveev et al. (2001)'s team effectiveness in the CCC model questionnaire. (Response format: 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree).

*Control Variables.* Three control variables (gender, accompanied by family, and assignment years which is explained as the number of years spent in the current post / subsidiary) were included in the analyses in an attempt to cater for alternative explanations for significant relationships. The control variables were measured as follows: gender (coded 0= Female, 1 =Male), accompanied by family (1= Yes 2= No), and number of years worked in current post was measured in numerical strength.

### **Quantitative Data Analysis**

We used both univariate and multivariate statistical procedures to analyse our survey data. Specifically, the use of Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) to determine how the individual factors predicted the observed variables of the study. First, before testing the hypotheses, both factor analysis and confirmatory factor analysis were conducted on our dependent and independent variables. The dependent or outcome variable is cross-cultural communication competence, while our independent or predictive variables are; training in host country culture (THC), expatriates' interpersonal skills (EIS) and Multicultural team effectiveness (MTE). Table 1 present the results of the confirmatory factor analyses of the observed variables. The use of Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ), composite reliability (C.R) and average variance explained (AVE) were employed to examine the reliability and validity of the scales. Results indicated that the Cronbach's alpha and construct reliability coefficients were above 0.60; whereas AVE were

within the 0.5 acceptable thresholds. Thus, the reliability of the scale was confirmed. Additionally, construct validity was achieved by making sure that only items loaded well on the scales were allowed while, discriminant validity was tested by comparing the square root of the AVE coefficients with the highest correlation of specific constructs (see Table 1). The results also show the number of items retained under each construct thus making sure common method bias was taken care of.

**Goodness of Fit Indices:** Apart from presenting the confirmatory factor analysis including reliability and validity checks for the variables used in the study, Table 1 also presents the goodness of fit indices for the measurement model. Given the general recommended fit indices in the acceptable application of SEM, our study model in Table 1 shows a perfectly good fit for analysis using Hu and Bentler's (1999) threshold indices. Additionally, Table 2 presents the correlation results of the means, standard deviations, and inter-correlations among variables of the study. It can be seen that expatriate's cross-cultural communication competence correlates positively with training in host country culture ( $r=.40$ ); with multicultural team effectiveness ( $r=.37$ ), and with interpersonal skills ( $r=.36$ )

**Table 1: Measurement Items, Factor loadings, Cronbach's  $\alpha$  and Goodness-of- indices**

Variables	Loading	T- value
<b>Expatriates' Interpersonal Skills (<math>\alpha = 0.86</math>, CR =0.82, AVE = 0.60)</b>		
I am able to deal with minor misunderstandings during communication	0.789***	7.608
My ability to communicate with local staff enables me to obtain the goals I need.	0.778	
I feel my communication with local staff motivates them to work	0.756***	9.773
<b>Training in Host Culture (<math>\alpha = 0.88</math>, CR = 0.87, AVE = 0.68)</b>		
Training in Ghanaian cultural values will facilitate my interpersonal skills	0.861	
Training in Ghanaian values will reduce my misconceptions and prejudices	0.775***	5.848
Training in Ghanaian cultural values will help me interact effectively with local staff.	0.842***	7.258
<b>Cross-Cult Communication Competence (<math>\alpha = 0.61</math>, C.R = 0.71, AVE = 0.60)</b>		
I am willing to be opened to the cultural differences in this company	0.674	
I am ready to tolerate the uncertainty arising from cultural differences	0.576***	6.222
Increase interaction with local staff enables me to understand better their culture	0.537***	5.909



**Multinational Team Effectiveness ( $\alpha = .62$ , C.R = 0.86, AVE = 0.68)**

I feel accepted by the local staff.

0.828

I trust the local staff in this company

0.825\*\*\* 7.734

The local staff trust me

0.819\*\*\* 8.794

*Goodness-of-fit Statistics: CMIN/Df = 1.632; GFI = 0.980; PCLOSE = 0.375**CFI = 0.950; IFI = 0.955; SRMR = 0.058; RMSEA = 0.056; TLI = 0.883***Table 2: Pearson's correlation matrix of the study variables**

	Mean	St. D.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Gender	1.12	0.33	1						
2. Assignment	2009	2.50	.12	1					
3. Accompany	1.67	0.61	.11	.24**	1				
4. EIS	5.87	0.62	-.03	-.15*	-.12	1			
5. THC	5.35	0.97	-.11	-.02	.04	.15*	1		
6. CCV	5.93	0.71	-.04	.06	.02	.36**	.40**	1	
7. MTE	5.09	0.68	-.02	-.06	.11	.28**	.20**	.37**	1

**Note:** \* = .50, \*\* = .01 level (2-tailed); EIS = *expatriates' interpersonal skills*; THC = *training in host culture*; CCC = *Cross-cultural communication competence*; MTE = *multinational team effectiveness*

**Table 3: Regression analysis of cross-cultural communication competence of expatriates**

Variables	Estimates ( $\beta$ )	T-values	P	R	R <sup>2</sup>	R adj.	MS	F	Sig.
Controls				0.559	0.313	0.292	5.339	14.945	0.00
Gender	-0.007	-0.122	0.903						
Accompanied	-0.016	-0.254	0.800						
Assignment	0.111	1.796	0.074						
EIS	0.261***	4.149	0.000						
THC	0.308***	5.048	0.000						
MTE	0.241***	3.814	0.000						

**Note:** \*\* = .01, \*\*\* = .001 level (2-tailed)

### Results of the Quantitative Strand

We used three approaches to analyse the quantitative data. First, we used Exploratory Factor Analysis to determine the construct validity of the instrument, and to identify the unique factors present in the data. In identifying the factors to extract for the model, the percentage of variance explained and the individual factor loadings were considered. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett test of sphericity were performed to assess the appropriateness of using factor analysis on our data, and all the figures met the threshold. Thus, Cross-cultural communication competence has a KMO of 0.791, Bartlett test = 0.000, and Cumulative variance explained (CVE) of 77.247%. Also, expatriates' interpersonal skills has a KMO value of 0.876, Bartlett test = 0.000, and CVE of 57.627%. Multicultural team effectiveness has a KMO of 0.813, Bartlett test = 0.000, and CVE of 59.51%. Finally, training in host cultural values has a KMO of 0.892, Bartlett test = 0.000 and CVE of 69.612%. These tests are significant, suggesting that an exploratory factor analysis is appropriate for determining our construct items.

Second, we used Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) to test both the structural and measurement models of our study variables. The benefits of using SEM is that it reduces measurement errors by subjecting all variables to a fitness test until a good fit model is obtained. Third, we used multiple regression to complement the SEM in testing the predictive effects of our hypotheses (H1, H2 and H3). Therefore, we tested our study hypotheses, that is; H1: *Expatriates' training in host country culture is positively related to their cross-cultural communication competence that will eventually enhance their business operations in subsidiary locations*; H2: *Multicultural team effectiveness is positively related to expatriates' cross-cultural communication competence that will eventually enhance their business operations in subsidiary locations*. H3: *Expatriates' interpersonal skills is positively related to their cross-cultural communication competence that will eventually enhance their business operations in subsidiary locations*. The test results in Table 3 show that training in host country culture is found to be positively related to expatriates' cross-cultural communication competence ( $\beta = .31$ ,  $t = 5.05$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Additionally, multicultural team effectiveness is found to be positively related to expatriates' cross-cultural communication competence ( $\beta = .24$ ,  $t = 3.81$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Finally, interpersonal skills is found to be positively related to expatriates' cross-cultural communication competence ( $\beta = .26$ ,  $t = 4.15$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Accordingly, our H1, H2 and H3 are all supported and accepted by the data.

## **Qualitative Phase**

### ***Qualitative Research Design and sample***

The qualitative strand involved an in-depth face-to-face interview with 21 senior expatriate executives working in seventeen MNC subsidiaries in Ghana. The collected interview data constitute a fundamental segment of this work and took into account a wide array of contextual factors inherent in cross-cultural communication competence of expatriates. The choice of the senior expatriate executives for interviews was to understand the impact of organizational level

control as senior executive formulate and implement most corporate policies. Hence, participants for the interview were mainly very senior-level expatriate executives in MNCs in Ghana. The empirical data was accessed through the experiences and interactions narrated by all participants and recorded using a semi-structured interview guide. The demographic characteristics of participants are located in Table 4.

### ***Interview Protocol Development***

As the aim of the qualitative phase was to explore and elaborate on the results of the statistical tests (Creswell, Plano Clark, Gutmann, and Hanson, 2003), our goal was to understand how cross-cultural communication competence impacts our main study outcomes (training in host country culture, multicultural team effectiveness, and cross-cultural differences). Hence, a total of six open-ended questions explored the influence of expatriates' cross-cultural communication competence in a sub-Saharan Africa business environment. The explored questions included: the significance of cross-cultural communication to expatriate operations/work in SSA, cross-cultural communication competence and multicultural team effectiveness for successful business operations of expatriates, Host country communication competence and multicultural team effectiveness, host country culture and competence in expatriate's cross-cultural communication for successful business operations, the importance of training in cross-cultural communication, and host cultural values.

**Table 4: Demographic Characteristics of Interviewed Respondents**

<b>Respondents</b>	<b>Job Position</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Years Worked in Ghana</b>
RESP 1	Vice- President- HRM	Male	3 years
RESP 2	V.P. Transformation	Male	2 year
RESP 3	Group Director-HRM	Female	5 years
RESP 4	Director HRM & Operations	Male	5 years
RESP 5	Vice- President- HRM	Male	2 year
RESP 6	Regional Manager- HR	Female	6 years
RESP 7	Director-Finance & Admin	Male	3 year
RESP 8	Plant Manager	Male	4 years
RESP 9	Managing Director	Male	8 years
RESP 10	General Manager	Male	2 years
RESP 11	Regional Policy Advisor	Male	2 years
RESP 12	Regional Economist	Female	2 years
RESP 13	BOC Manager	Male	2 year
RESP 14	Senior Manager	Male	9 years
RESP 15	Reg. Commercial Manager	Male	2 years
RESP 16	Head of Credit	Male	7 years
RESP 17	Head of Business Support	Male	2 years
RESP18	Head of income Trading	Male	5 years
RESP 19	Senior Operations Officer	Male	6 years
RESP 20	Brands Manager	Male	3 years
RESP 21	Managing Director	Female	4 years

**Note:** RESP = *Respondent*

### **Procedure and Data Analysis of the Qualitative Interview**

Participants in this project were very senior expatriate executives working in the various subsidiary multinational corporations in Ghana in supervisory roles who interacted with both expatriate and local staffs. The interviewees in this study required the description of their day-to-day experiences of working with the indigenous staff in the various subsidiaries relative to cross-cultural interactions and the host country cultural norms in their workplaces in as much thorough as they desired to share with the researcher. Thus, the interviewees shared their lived experiences with the interviewer through audio interviews. Each taped interview lasted between 30 minutes to 1 hour 20 minutes. A benefit of the audio-taped interview is that it enables the researcher to engage in long conversations and concentrate on listening and analysing what was being said without having to worry about taking notes (Sacks, 1992). The

taped interviews were transcribed one-by-one from each of the 21 subjects, and the significant statements extracted from these transcriptions became the raw data for analysis. From the transcriptions, meanings were formulated as codes from these significant statements. The formulated meanings were arrived at by reading, rereading, and reflecting upon the significant statements in the original transcriptions in order to get the honest meaning of the interviewees' statements. The aggregated formulated meanings were then organized into categories of themes which emerged from and were common to all of the subjects' descriptions. These are: the influence of training in host country culture on cross-cultural communication competence, the role of cross-cultural communication competence in multicultural team effectiveness, and the significance of expatriates' cross-cultural communication competence in expatriates' interpersonal skills.

#### ***Validation of the Qualitative data***

The categories were referred back to the original descriptions in order to validate them. A further validation of the categorised data was undertaken by contacting some of the participant-interviewees since it was very difficult to contact all of them again. Seven of the participants were revisited while the other eight were contacted through telephone (telephone numbers and email addresses of participants were collected by the interviewer during the interviews). This was done to facilitate feedback if the descriptions formulated validated their initial experiences in which they agreed.

#### **Findings from the Qualitative Strand**

From the 21 interviews, several many significant statements were extracted as codes for the study. The analysis of these significant statements revealed three major clusters of themes that captured the research question on the impact of cross-cultural communication on expatriate operations or work outcomes in MNC subsidiaries in Ghana as follows:

### ***The Influence of Training in Host Country Culture on Expatriates' Cross-Cultural Communication Competence for Successful Business Operations***

All respondents in the study agreed that training in host country culture contributes significantly to successful cross-cultural communication skills of expatriates in their operations abroad. According to them, given the strategic importance of international assignments and its cost to the MNC headquarters, expatriates need to be trained in the host country culture in order to be more productive in subsidiary matters. Thus, the field results copiously affirmed cross-cultural training as a response to successful cross-cultural communication of expatriates in Ghana. In the course of the international assignment, what is really significant is for expatriates to understand the application of the English language in the local context. In addition, the requirement of expatriates to have training in host country culture in order to improve their relationship with not only the local Staff, but also with people from the local communities where they reside and work will give them an added advantage to work successfully in the subsidiary. This is brilliantly explained by Respondent 7:

*I strongly believe that expatriates should be trained in the host cultural behaviors if they want to be successful in their operations abroad. I've gone to countries before, where we had this cultural training class and it was very effective because, you didn't spend weeks or months trying to figure out why I'm being less productive at work than I think I ought to be, and why am I so frustrated every day, or how come I don't understand why people here do things the way they do. The truth is that some people honestly hit the ground because they think things are the same everywhere. I've travelled overseas for 20+ years, and I've worked in many different places so cultural diversity is something I embrace. Do I always understand it? No, and could I benefit by two days internship or training? Yes I do.*

### ***Cross-Cultural Communication Competence as a Facilitator of Multicultural Team Effectiveness for Successful Business Operations***

The interview results showed that competence in cross-cultural communication facilitates multicultural team effectiveness for successful business operations in Ghana. Most respondents recommended that when expatriates understand team attitudes to diversity, expatriates are then

encouraged to explore and appreciate the local staff behaviors which strengthens the bond of multicultural team effectiveness for successful business and work outcomes in the MNC. The analysis of the results showed that in general, there are differences in points of references, expectations and approaches to work between expatriates and indigenous staff. These differences are mostly due to misinterpretations and misunderstanding of the communicative behaviors of the local staff. However, a good appreciation of these behaviors from the side of expatriates enhances the bond between them and increases team trust leading to an efficient team that would operate effectively. The following excerpt from the interviews illustrate these points.

*Well, the Ghanaian culture is unique as is everybody's culture. So, when you come here as an expatriate as I did, you have to learn the customary ways of doing things. You need to understand the local staff and work with them to relish your differences. But more than anything, I think it's an understanding and expectation, and appreciation for a culture that makes the most difference in acknowledging one another's strengths and weaknesses and working with each other in harmony. You have to be able to embrace the differences and accept them as genuine right of norm for effective cohabitation, and for successful work operations [Respondent 4]*

*Experience has shown that expatriates may have all the technical knowledge and skills for a particular role but they are not always successful in their business operations. Usually, when they come into the new environment they typically find their performance slump in the initial stages and either they come out of the slump and become extremely positive contributors, or they remain in the trough. It is not because they don't know their jobs, it's because they are unable to adapt to the environment and the local staff as an effective team. The first thing is the correct selection of expatriates, and how easily do they adapt to new circumstances, new environment and therefore work harmoniously with the local staff in a cohesive team effort to succeed in their operations. [Respondent 16]*

### ***Expatriates' Interpersonal Skills and Cross-Cultural Communication Competence***

The interview results showed that expatriates with high interpersonal skills are those with the capabilities of communicating effectively in subsidiary operations. Most of the interviewees revealed that learning the differences in cultural applications and background of people are the best interpersonal skills to be acquired by an expatriate which are prerequisites in expatriates'



proficiency in cross-cultural communication. The interview results indicated that soft skills or interpersonal skills are the strategic factors in facilitating expatriates' cross-cultural communication competence for successful business or work operations. The reason is that interpersonal skills acquisition makes the expatriate more matured in the subsidiary location to better understand the meaning and sensitivity to diversity which embraces flexibility, honesty, respect and trust. These skills therefore become the outcome of effectively communicating and understanding intercultural and cross-cultural communication. Expatriates in subsidiary locations need special soft skills to enable them understand not only the local staff, but the whole culture of the business setup in the host country. For example, expatriates in sales business would succeed if they can learn an aspect of the local language usage through cross-cultural skills training in communication behavior, as they find themselves in the field of business transactions. This is highlighted by Respondent 15:

*In fact, before I came to Ghana, I did go on a short programme to familiarise myself with some of the customs, language and geography of Ghana. Although I had been on two previous expatriate assignments, it's the first time I did something like this, and I found it enormously beneficial in business operations here. Because, these are soft skills that you learn not from the classroom or by reading but by opening yourself up and experiencing what you can do to succeed in the interactions between you and the indigenous people. So I think basic language training is always matched with when people are greeted in their own language. It's a little difficult when you are dealing with an environment like Ghana where multiple local languages are spoken. So expatriates need to be aware of these things that will help them operate effectively in different cultures.*

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

The aim of this study was to assess the impact of cross-cultural communication competence of expatriates on their business operations and work outcomes in multinational subsidiaries in Ghana. Using both quantitative and qualitative data analysis, it was established that when expatriates develop their skills in cross-cultural communication, their business or work

operations are improved through effective interaction with local staff in MNCs abroad. In the first place, our findings indicated that training in host country culture is significant and positively related to cross-cultural communication competence ( $\beta = .31$ ,  $t=5.05$ ,  $p<.001$ ) of expatriates which is necessary for their success business operations. The qualitative findings supports this results and further explains that host country culture is responsible for successful cross-cultural communication of expatriates in their business operations abroad. This is because training in host country culture enables expatriates to be skilful in applying the English language to the local context to ease understanding. Hence, the need for expatriates to be trained in host country culture in order to facilitate their interactions with both the local staff and the communities where they reside and work. Second, our quantitative findings showed that multicultural team effectiveness is significant and positively related to cross-cultural communication competence ( $\beta = .24$ ,  $t=3.81$ ,  $p<.001$ ). This finding is complemented by the qualitative results which explained further and in more detailed manner that cross-cultural communication competence of expatriates is very instrumental in promoting multicultural team effectiveness for successful business operations of expatriates abroad. Through competence in cross-cultural communication, expatriates are able to understand the language skills of the local staff which helps them to appreciate the local staff behaviors thereby building and reinforcing team unity and strength for effective operations or work outcomes in the subsidiary.

Third, our findings also indicate that expatriates' interpersonal skills are linked to their competence in cross-cultural communication in subsidiary locations. Our quantitative results revealed a strong and positive relationship between expatriates' interpersonal skills and their cross-cultural communication competence ( $\beta = .26$ ,  $t=4.15$ ,  $p<.001$ ). Additionally, our qualitative results complemented this findings by emphasising the critical nature of expatriates' interpersonal skills in acquiring competence in cross-cultural communication for successful business operations in the subsidiary. The interview results further elaborated that since

Ghanaians are people centered in which the local staff emphasise deep human relations and respect for superiors and co-workers, it takes foreigners with high interpersonal skills to develop deep interpersonal relations with the indigenous people through cross-cultural communication competence.

In sum, the critical insight derived from this empirical work are the following:

First, the significant effect of knowledge in host country culture on cross-cultural communication competence of expatriates. By this, our results provides an interesting awareness and knowledge of social and cultural context as skills necessary for effective communication in international business operations. Hence, this research builds on prior studies and explores the unique contribution of host country in communication quality and knowledge as evidence of competence in cross-cultural communication. Second, the link between multicultural team effectiveness and cross-cultural communication competence is significant in cross-cultural management and operations. The reason is that an effective multicultural team deepens effective interpersonal relations between expatriates and local staff working together in which cross-cultural communication becomes the glue that binds them. Third, the acquisition of high interpersonal skills by expatriates is a sine-qua-non for expatriates' proficiency in cross-cultural communication that quickens their successful business operations abroad.

### ***Theoretical Contribution and Relevance***

First, the theoretical contribution of this work is the impact of training in host country culture on cross-cultural communication competence of expatriates. This finding reinforce the cultural impact of language and communication. Culture shapes our worldview and since culture and language are intertwined, effective communication is bonded in the traditional interpretation of the people. By this, the findings of this work illustrates the significance of quality and not quantity in communication and interactions between expatriates and local staff in multinational

subsidiaries. The reason is that, there is bound to be meaning differentials between expatriates and local staff who are from different cultures. In most cases, expatriate executive dwell too much on instructive communication which is more of quantitatively sending out messages rather than paying attention to the ingredients of the communication of the context that yield quality and understanding. Communication is supposed to be contextualized in order to bring out the real meaning to the receiver. Therefore, host country culture significantly plays a preponderant role in contextualizing communication and interaction in international business. The findings of this work validates the importance of training in host country culture (Abugre, 2016; Tung, 2008; Black and Mendenhall, 1990), but goes further to illustrate the importance of understanding the communicative behaviors of the context that will enrich corporate success of MNC subsidiaries. Training in host country culture results in increase expatriates' cultural awareness, knowledge, and communication skills so that they are better able to deal with possible multiple interpretation of communication.

Our second theoretical contribution is that by examining the influence of cross-cultural communication competence on multicultural team effectiveness, we extend the knowledge in international business as a critical success factor of globalization. Given the importance of mobility and the heterogeneity of societies in interpersonal encounters and interactions, an efficient multicultural team is a panacea for effective globalization of businesses. Our findings illuminate the significance of considering the sensitivity of team members in order to ensure a cohesive team project success. Effective multicultural team can be a source of innovation if there is proper understanding and integration of the team diversity. Effective cross-cultural communication supports a climate of integration and innovation of multicultural team members in the subsidiary. Hence, our result explains that expatriates must learn to embrace the differences in order to understand and appreciate the context of local staff. This would create a strong bond of cohabitation among team members in order to realize their work goals.

Thus, the degree of expatriates' cross-cultural communication competence relates to a strong expatriates and local employees' relationship particularly in distant locations. Competence in cross-cultural communication builds the prospects for personal contact that promotes positive attitudes toward multicultural team members. This finding authenticates Tannen (1984)'s proposition that the best ways of communicating meanings are learnt in a particular speech community or culture, especially by communicating and identifying with the indigenous people.

Our third contribution to theory is in the area of communication and culture, a scarcely studied domain in cross-cultural literature. Culture and communication are complicatedly connected. Thus, expatriates and local staff cannot understand each other without first appreciating their differences through their respective social and cultural contexts. Our findings illustrate that competence in cross-cultural communication endures the differences that are precipitous to conflict situations in MNCs. Conflict in multicultural teams would normally result from misunderstanding and miscommunication due to differences in cultural behaviors of team members. For example, low-context and high-context variations in communication (Gudykunst, 2003). This work theorizes that understanding the communicative behaviors of team members through cross-cultural learning can minimize these conflicts. This is possible through the acquisition of relational skills that enables expatriates to communicate openly and supportively with local staff and by listening actively and non-evaluatively with them during work.

Finally, the geographic focus of this study – Ghana, an emerging country contributes significantly to the global strategy of multinational institutions in Sub-Saharan Africa economies. The fact that most international studies focus on the Western context at the neglect of Sub-Saharan Africa and other scarce areas is at odds with global cultural knowledge and awareness (Tung, 2008); and provokes the debate on the neglected region of management

scholarship (Walsh, 2015). As “context matters in global strategy” especially in settings that have received limited attention in the past (Mol, Stadler, and Arino, 2017:3). This study undoubtedly contributes to multinational business in the area of cross-cultural communication and offer diverse insights to cross-cultural management theory.

### ***Managerial Relevance***

Practically, Multinational corporations (MNCs) are highly dependent on effective communication to control and coordinate their distributed operations. This is often carried out by the workforce consisting of both local staff from the location and expatriates from headquarters or other third country nationals. Thus, MNCs and their subsidiary operations must orient their managers to adopt company values and behaviors that promote effective interactions through social gatherings and community socialization that enable expatriates to learn some cultural norms.

Second, our findings provide support for multicultural team effectiveness and cross-cultural communication. Cultures prescribe the protocols through which foreigners and locals alike can relate with each other. When expatriates learn all these cultural protocols, they are able to live in harmony with the indigenous people. Effective multicultural team improves workers’ responsiveness to organization thereby accelerating productivity. It also shapes individual perception and reasoning thereby stimulating learning and behavior since MNCs’ tasks require collaboration. Thus, effective multicultural team would benefit positive work outcomes in the location.

Third, this study provides the significant role of cross-cultural communication competence in the operations of multinational subsidiaries particularly in complex and multicultural environment. Most often, multinational subsidiaries take for granted the value systems and cultural behaviors of the local people. Especially MNCs from the West operating in developing countries sometimes believe in their cultural superiority over that of the subsidiary location,

and this can create serious conflict and differences in the MNC. Our findings suggest however the positive impact of interpersonal skills on cross-cultural competence in communication. This presupposes that management of multinational subsidiaries ought to intensify contextual cross-cultural training of expatriates in order to enhance their interpersonal skills for better operations in the subsidiaries. Interpersonal skills would enable expatriates to tolerate and cultivate good relationship between expatriates and local staff through effective communication in order to improve their work output.

### ***Limitations and Future Research***

Despite these contributions and implications, the study has few limitations that can be corrected in future. First, responses from the study could have been overstated due to social desirability effects. Social desirability can easily occur in cultural studies like this very one when participants give a culturally acceptable response rather than describing exactly what the topic really says. Nonetheless, the control mechanisms associated with questionnaire like self-administration of the instrument, the assurance of confidentiality, are some of the actions to assuage the effect of social desirability. Additionally, the use of mixed method in this study renders the data robust due the triangulations of the two different methods.

Second, this is a single national culture study focused on expatriates in MNCs in Ghana. While a single national culture study is good because of its ability to reduce extraneous variations resulting from different country/nationalities, it is possible that some of the findings may be unique to the MNCs in Ghana and not to other countries thereby limiting generalisability. Future research can apply a multinational data collection for improvement. Albeit these limitations, this study makes a strong contribution to the international HR literature through a mixed method approach. The weakness of a single method analysis has been offset by the multiple data gathering analysis.

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### Appendix 1

#### Exploratory Factor Analysis, KMO, Bartlett's test and CVE Results

Measurement	KMO	Bartlett's Test	CVE	No. of items
<b>EIS</b>	<b>0.87</b>	<b>0.000</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>THC</b>	0.89	0.000	69	9
<b>CCC</b>	0.71	0.000	77	9
<b>MTE</b>	0.81	0.000	59	10

*Note: Threshold: CVE = Cumulative Variance Explained, > 50%; KMO = Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin, minimum value > 0.6; Bartlett's test of Sphericity (p-value < 0.05)*